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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

More Than Wheels and UTEC Celebrate First Graduate of Innovative Pilot Program: Workforce Development Empowered with Reliable Transportation

Lowell, Mass.—Directors from More Than Wheels and the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) presented the keys for a 2000 Toyota Camry to Julian “Howie” Rivera Wednesday, October 12th in a brief ceremony at Lobster Anywhere in Lowell, Massachusetts where Howie works as an Order Fulfillment Specialist. The agencies’ pilot program supports employment options for low-income youth through integrated programming that provides on-the-job training, GED and financial education classes, and access to reliable vehicles.

As a UTEC member Howie has made transformational changes in his life by gaining job skills, earning his GED, earning his driver’s license and becoming drug free. “I couldn’t have done this without the support of UTEC: my co-workers, the teens there, the UTEC staff, and the support of my mother,” said Howie when he was handed the keys to the Toyota by Mary Burnett of More Than Wheels.

For the past three months, Howie and 10 other UTEC youth participated in the Financial Fitness classes offered by More Than Wheels as an important part of the soft skills training emphasized by UTEC’s Workforce Development program.

UTEC’s programming targets Lowell’s most at-risk youth and engages youth in workforce development programs and educational options through GED classes and an alternative diploma program. The Workforce training focuses on both hard skills, such as how to swing a hammer, and soft skills, like how to properly communicate with a manager and More Than Wheels’ financial fitness training.

“Howie is a great success story,” exclaimed Gregg Croteau, Executive Director of UTEC. “He has come such a long way, and we are very proud of his progress. Howie’s hard work at UTEC has opened so many doors for him.” Howie graduated from UTEC’s program and secured a full time job at Lobster Anywhere, after interning with the company in the final stage of UTEC’s program.

The job itself was a huge step forward – but Howie still faced the challenge of taking two busses to get to work promptly at 9am.

“Transportation is a huge barrier that prevents people from getting and keeping a job,” said Mary Burnett, Director of Car Services for nonprofit More Than Wheels, a nonprofit that helps people obtain reliable, fuel-efficient cars. “Where there is limited transportation, or schedules that don’t mesh with job requirements, employees are often let go for being late. Lack of transportation also means not being able to look elsewhere for jobs that may offer better salaries and benefits.”

More Than Wheels provides personal financial education to give people the tools they need to improve and maintain ongoing financial stability. They use the car-buying process as a catalyst for financial change that empowers people to establish or repair their credit and control their financial futures.

“For so many individuals, like Howie, lack of credit left few options to obtain a reliable and affordable vehicle,” said Burnett. “Getting his own car is the tangible result of Howie’s dedication and hard work on financial management, a process he will continue as he makes payments to own the car outright and increase his credit.”

“As we celebrate Howie’s success, we also invite community support for the expansion of this pilot project, so more high-risk, low-income youth like Howie can travel smoother roads to their futures,” said UTEC Executive Director Gregg Croteau. For more information on how to support the program or establish an affordable UTEC internship program at your company, please contact Derek Mitchell at dmitchell@utec-lowell.org or 978-856-3910.

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More Than Wheels is an award-winning nonprofit organization that helps people get the best deal on a reliable and fuel-efficient car. Since its establishment in 2001, More Than Wheels has helped nearly 1,500 New England residents get the best deal on a new or nearly new car by negotiating with dealers to secure the lowest price and providing the lowest interest rate available. More Than Wheels provides personal financial education by giving people the tools and knowledge they need to improve and maintain their financial stability—now and in the future. Learn more at www.morethanwheels.org.

UTEC’s nationally recognized model begins with intensive street outreach and gang peacemaking, reaching Lowell’s most disconnected youth “where they’re at.” Each enrolled young person receives up to three years of intensive case management. UTEC engages youth in workforce development programs and educational options through GED classes and an alternative diploma program. Social justice and civic engagement are embedded in all programming, with special emphasis in our organizing and policymaking work both locally and statewide. Learn more at www.utec-lowell.org.